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METHOD AND DEVICE FOR SENDING GREETING CARD WITH JOINT PRIZE LOTTERY
[Kensho kuji-tsuke sogo aisatsujo no soshin hoho oyobi sochi]

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[Title of the Invention]

/1

Method and Device for Sending Greeting Card with Joint Prize Lottery

[Claims]

/2

[Claim 1]

Method for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a data system having a procedure for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card, a procedure for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a procedure for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, and

a procedure for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for winning the gift linked to sending the greeting card.

[Claim 2]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having a procedure for registering the sender and the recipient of the greeting card in a prize lottery with a possibility of both the sender and the recipient winning.

[Claim 3]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having the sender select the gift in the prize lottery entered.

[Claim 4]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having a procedure for sending a greeting card by the sender addressed to another recipient and entering another prize lottery for the above-mentioned sender and the second recipient.

Numbers in the margin indicate pagination in the foreign text.

[Claim 5]

Method described in Claim 4, characterized by the entry to the other prize lottery being a prize lottery for winning another gift.

[Claim 6]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having a procedure for determining the winner of the prize lottery and giving the gift to the winning sender and recipient.

[Claim 7]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having a procedure for checking by the sender on a personal web page whether the selected gift has been won or lost.

[Claim 8]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by having a procedure for checking by the recipient on a personal web page whether the selected gift has been won or lost.

[Claim 9]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by the greeting card being a time-sensitive greeting card and displaying different greeting cards depending on the time viewed.

[Claim 10]

Method described in Claim 9, characterized by being unable to view the time-sensitive greeting card if the recipient attempts to view it before a predetermined time.

[Claim 11]

Method described in Claim 9, characterized when the greeting card is a New Year's card by displaying the entire New Year's card only on a specified day.

[Claim 12]

Method described in Claim 9, characterized by displaying the time-sensitive greeting card on a special screen when the greeting

card is viewed at a predetermined time.

[Claim 13]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by allowing only the sender or the recipient to check whether the selected gift was won or lost after the prize lottery conducted randomly has ended.

[Claim 14]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by the greeting card containing an advertisement regarding the selected gift.

[Claim 15]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by the web site used to create the greeting card containing several advertisements regarding one of several gifts.

[Claim 16]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by the web page used to check whether or not the prize lottery number is a winning prize number containing an advertisement regarding the selected gift.

[Claim 17]

Method described in Claim 9, characterized when the greeting card is viewed on specific day by displaying a special screen for this specific day.

[Claim 18]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by requesting the recipient to fill out a questionnaire before the recipient creates the first greeting card of several "courses" sponsored by different advertisers.

[Claim 19]

Method described in Claim 18, characterized by displaying a keyword advertisement created for the sender according to the answers to the questionnaire by the recipient.

[Claim 20]

Method described in Claim 1, characterized by the receiving procedure for designing the greeting card by the sender having a procedure for displaying several "courses" for each of several advertisers offering gifts.

[Claim 21]

Method described in Claim 20, characterized by the course selected by the sender containing a procedure for selecting gifts by the sender.

[Claim 22]

Method for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a data system having a procedure for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card, a procedure for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a procedure for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender,

a procedure for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and

a procedure for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

[Claim 23]

Method described in Claim 22, characterized by having the recipient send greeting cards to other persons when the recipient receives the notice of the greeting card sent by the sender.

[Claim 24]

Method described in Claim 22, characterized by the recipient being able to view who sent the greeting card at any time, but being able to view the contents of the greeting card only for a predetermined period.

[Claim 25]

Device for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a data system having a structural part for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card, a structural part for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts, /3

a structural part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, and

a structural part for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for winning the gift linked to sending the greeting card.

[Claim 27]

Device for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a data system having a structural part for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card, a structural part for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a structural part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender,

a structural part for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and

a structural part for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

[Claim 28]

Computer program product, being a computer program product comprised of a computer-readable medium having a computer-readable code for executing activities related to a greeting card with prize lottery,

characterized by having a computer-readable program code device for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card,

a computer-readable program code device for receiving input by the

sender selecting one of several gifts,

a computer-readable program code device for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, and

a computer-readable program code device for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for winning the gift linked to sending the greeting card.

[Claim 29]

Computer program product, being a computer program product comprised of a computer-readable medium having a computer-readable code for executing activities related to a greeting card with prize lottery,

characterized by having a computer-readable program code device for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card,

a computer-readable program code device for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a computer-readable program code device for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender,

a computer-readable program code device for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and

a computer-readable program code device for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

[Claim 30]

Device for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a data system having a structural part for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card,

a structural part for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a structural part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card

to a recipient specified by the sender, and
a structural part for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for
winning the gift linked to sending the greeting card.

[Claim 31]

Device for sending greeting card with joint prize lottery by a
data system having a structural part for creating an electronic
greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card,
a structural part for receiving input by the sender selecting one of
several gifts,

a structural part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card
to a recipient specified by the sender,

a structural part for creating a dynamically generated personal web
page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all
greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and

a structural part for creating a dynamically generated personal web
page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on
all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

[Claim 32]

Computer data signal, characterized by displaying an instruction
sequence for executing activities related to a greeting card with
prize lottery by a processor when having the processor execute by
executing a procedure for creating an electronic greeting card by a
sender by having the sender input a greeting card,

a procedure for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several
gifts,

a procedure for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a
recipient specified by the sender, and

a procedure for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for winning the
gift linked to sending the greeting card.

[Claim 33]

Computer data signal, characterized by displaying an instruction
sequence for executing activities related to greeting cards with prize

lottery by a processor when having the processor execute by executing a procedure for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender by having the sender input a greeting card,

a procedure for receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts,

a procedure for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender,

a procedure for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and

a procedure for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

[Detailed Explanation of the Invention]

The present application is based on U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/066,952 filed on November 26, 1997, and asserts a prior claim based on Section 120(e) of the Patent Act of the United States of America. The entire text of said application is included in the present application. The English-language document provisionally filed on August 18, 1998, is also included in the present application.

[Industrial Field of the Invention]

This invention pertains generally to a software application, and more particularly, to a method and device for sending and receiving an electronic greeting card linked to registering for a prize lottery.

[Prior Art]

With the spread of the Internet, businesses are starting to search for means to turn a profit from this spread. For some years now, web sites have enabled people to send electronic "greeting cards" to other people. In many cases, these greeting cards have pictures, appropriate messages, or greetings.

[Problems that the Invention is to Solve] that the Invention is to Solve]

One of the problems businesses face when offering greeting cards

on the Internet in this way is that there is no practical difference in motivation between sending a greeting card through a business web site and sending a greeting card by regular e-mail (electronic mail). As far as the sender is concerned, there is no strong incentive for sending an electronic greeting card. Which is to say, the sender can express the same feelings by regular e-mail, and can append pictures and other attachments. The fact that there is no strong incentive for sending an electronic greeting card also affects greeting card sales. That is, many potential users are simply using e-mail instead of electronic greeting cards.

Electronic greeting cards by prior art, no matter what the type, have the drawback that they lack human warmth. Someone may have put a lot of thought into selecting a greeting card message or picture, but this is not always necessarily clear to the recipient. Furthermore, greeting cards by prior art, once received, are quickly read by the recipient and forgotten. It must be said that once received, there is not necessarily any strong incentive for a recipient to reread or think about a greeting card again. Advertisers cause advertisements to be read once by publishing them on a web page, and because advertisers are supporting many free greeting card sites economically, there is a demand for building web sites and web pages that users will read one or more times.

As described above, advertisers are supporting many web sites economically. However, one of the problems for web sites by prior art is that web pages display "keyword advertisements" without users asking for them. Often, the same keywords are displayed to every user, and many users dislike keyword advertisements, have no great demand for them, and see them as an annoyance. Such users do not always view keyword advertisements by prior art with favor.

[Means of Solving the Problems]

In the working examples of this invention, a person (called the "sender") can send an electronic greeting card to one or more recipients. During the process of selecting and designing the electronic greeting card to be sent, there is a process for the sender to select several potential gifts that he or she thinks the recipient will like. When the electronic greeting card is created and sent, a lottery prize is attached to the greeting card. By inputting the greeting card, the sender and the recipient become a team and are entered in a lottery to win the selected gift. The greeting card sent by the sender to the recipient has the prize lottery entry, and links the sender and the receiver as a team. If the entered greeting card

wins the lottery, both the sender and the recipient win the gift. Both the sender and the recipient can check on-line at a later date whether or not they got the selected gift.

Because the sender may receive a gift when he or she sends the electronic greeting card, this becomes a reason for sending an electronic greeting card instead of using regular e-mail. The more electronic greeting cards the sender sends to different people, the greater the chance of winning the gift. Furthermore, because the sender selects a gift for each recipient indicated, each recipient can know that the sender is thinking of what he or she likes. For example, if a businessman knows that his colleague likes golf, he can register for an expensive golf club.

Furthermore, the recipient realizes that the sender was thoughtful enough to select a personal gift. Because both win the selected gift if the entered greeting card wins the lottery, the sender and the recipient share a "comradery." Furthermore, both the sender and the recipient share the emotion of thinking about the electronic greeting card, and are driven by excitement to recheck whether or not they have won the selected gift. This becomes one of the stimuli for advertisers to report gift lottery results using a web page.

This invention can be used for a new type of advertising that people want to pay attention to called "solicited ads" or "acceptance ads." Because senders show a spontaneous interest and expose themselves to the advertising investigated and selected during the process of viewing and selecting a gift, there is a high probability that people viewing this are interested in the advertisement. Although the recipients have not selected the advertisement, it is likely that /5 they, too, will show an interest in the advertisement received.

At least one working example (although not all working examples) includes sending time-sensitive greeting cards. This working example indicates the date that the recipient may view the electronic greeting card. If the electronic greeting card arrives early and the recipient tries to view it before the set period (such as close to New Year's Day), the recipient receives the greeting card and knows that it is from somebody, but cannot actually view the greeting card. The electronic greeting card cannot be viewed until a specific period determined ahead of time; for example, two weeks before or after New Year's Day. If the recipient views the greeting card during the predetermined period (for example, between New Year's Day and January 16th, or exactly on New Year's morning), the recipient can view a

special New Year's message in addition to the electronic greeting card. If the recipient views the electronic greeting card after the determined period, he or she sees the greeting card, but without seeing the special message.

By contrast, the greeting card in another working example of this invention (for example, for summer visits or Valentine's Day cards) is not time-sensitive, but the user can view the greeting card at whatever time it may be received. According to this other working example, certain types of greeting cards can be made time-sensitive, and other types of greeting cards can be made not time-sensitive.

Furthermore, according to certain working examples, participants cannot send greeting cards after a certain date (for example, two weeks after New Year's Day). Moreover, in certain working examples, the sender and the recipient each can view a personal web site showing what electronic greeting cards have been sent or received. Thus, each electronic greeting card is registered on the sender's page and on the recipient's page. After the prize lottery, the personal web page displays whether or not each recipient/sender pair got the selected gift when the recipient or the sender views the page. As described above, this becomes one incentive for advertisers to advertise themselves on web pages reporting gift lottery results.

According to the working examples described above and the purpose of this invention given here in outline, this invention pertains to a method using a data processing system, and this system contains a process for receiving input from a sender and the recipient creating an electronic greeting card, a process for receiving input from the sender and the recipient selecting one of several gifts, a process for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, and a process for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for the gift and linking this entry to the electronic greeting card.

Furthermore, according to the working examples described above and the purpose of this invention given here in outline, this invention pertains to a method using a data processing system, and pertains to a method for receiving an input from a sender creating an electronic greeting card by the sender, receiving an input from the sender selecting one of several gifts, sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender

Translator's Note: error for "sender"

allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

Furthermore, according to the working examples described above and the purpose of this invention given here in outline, this invention pertains to a device comprised of a part for receiving input from a sender creating an electronic greeting card by the sender, a part receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts, a part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, and a part for submitting an entry to a prize lottery for winning the gift linked to the greeting card.

Furthermore, according to the working examples described above and the purpose of this invention given here in outline, this invention pertains to a device comprised of a part for receiving input from a sender creating an electronic greeting card by the sender, a part receiving input by the sender selecting one of several gifts, a part for sending a notice of the electronic greeting card to a recipient specified by the sender, a part for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the sender allowing the sender to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the sender, and a part for creating a dynamically generated personal web page for the recipient allowing the recipient to view information on all greeting cards sent and received by the recipient.

Some of the advantages of this invention will be described in the following explanation, and some will be clear from this explanation or from the working examples of this invention. The purpose and characteristics of this invention can be understood and achieved from the elements and combinations specially indicated in the description of the claims above and their equivalents.

[Working Examples]

Working examples of this invention will be explained below in detail referring to the figures. In all of the following figures, the same reference numbers are used to indicate the same or corresponding parts.

(1) General Study

Before studying details, an example of the data processing system for implementing the working examples of this invention will be

explained below. Figure 1 shows an example of a data processing system according to the first working example of this invention. Figure 1 contains sender system (102), server system (104), and recipient system (160). These systems can be a combination of one or two data processing systems instead of three systems. Server (104), sender system (102), and recipient system (160) also become an accurate data processing system. Each of these contains processors (110), (122), and (162), and memory devices (112), (124), and (164). Sender system (102) and memory device (112) contain browser software (114), which may be any web browser, and e-mail software (115), which is a suitable e-mail software. Memory device (112) also contains at least one web page (such as html) downloaded for display by browser (114), and e-mail messages (119) to be sent or received by the sender. Memory device (112) also contains data to be used by software. The steps of the working example of this invention described above are executed by computer program commands executed by each of processors (110), (122), and (162).

Memory device (124) of server (104) contains server software (125) for making the functions described here and e-mail software (129) functional. Memory device (124) also contains one or more web pages (126) (such as html) for designing an electronic greeting card by the sender and selecting the gift to be won by the sender or the recipient. Memory device (124) also contains at least one web page (128) (such as html) allowing the recipient to view the greeting card. Memory device (124) also contains an appended personal web page (such as html; not shown) allowing the recipient to check whether or not he or she has won the prize lottery gift, and to view sent and received greeting cards. Memory device (124) also contains data (127) to be used by software. These data can include pair information such as the sender/recipient pair and the gift selected by the sender.

Memory device (164) of recipient system (160) contains e-mail software (166), which is a suitable e-mail software. Memory device (164) also contains at least one web page (168) (such as html), and e-mail messages (not shown) sent or received by the recipient. Memory device (164) also contains data (170) to be used by software.

Each of these systems preferably also contains one operating system (not shown), but it should be clear to persons skilled in the art how to contain appended information such as application operating systems and data in the memory devices. Data processing system (100) (or the other data processing systems described here) can also contain supplemental data and software and/or many elements not shown in the figure, such as information in a memory, disk drives, a keyboard, a

display device, a network connection, supplemental memory, a supplemental CPU, a LAN, or input/output lines.

This invention is not limited to certain specified working examples or programming techniques, and this invention can be reduced to practice using any appropriate technology for reducing the functions explained here to practice. This invention can be reduced to practice by certain pertinent operating systems using certain pertinent program languages and programming techniques.

Some or all of the instructions and data structure of storage areas (112), (124), and (164) can be read from memory by computer-readable medium (156) (or a similar computer-readable medium not shown in the figure). Processors (110), (122), and (162) execute the processor steps explained here by executing the sequence of instructions contained in storage areas (112), (124), and (164). In a substitute working example, this invention can be reduced to practice using hardware circuits combined with software instructions instead of software instructions. Therefore, the working examples of this invention are not limited to a particular combination of hardware circuits and software.

The term "computer-readable medium" used here means all media giving instructions for execution by a processor. Although not limited to these, such media can employ many modes, including nonvolatile media, volatile media, and transmission media. Nonvolatile media include, for example, storage devices such as optical disks or magnetic disks. Volatile media include dynamic memories. Transmission media are coaxial cables, copper wires, and optical fibers, including wires comprising buses inside a computer. Transmission media can also employ the modes of radio waves, acoustic waves produced by infrared radiation data communication, or optical waves, or the mode of electrical signals transmitted by computer networks. Standard modes of computer-readable media are floppy disks, flexible disks, hard disks, magnetic tapes or other magnetic media, CD-ROM or other optical media, punch cards, paper tapes, and other physical media having hole patterns, RAM, PROM, EPROM, flash EPROM, and other memory chips or cartridges, the carrier waves described below, or other media readable by computer. The instructions stored in storage areas (112), (124), and (164) can be transmitted as carrier waves on media such as the Internet, LAM, WAN, the Intranet, or cellular networks, then stored in storage area (112), (124), or (164).

(2) Creating Electronic Greeting Cards

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram showing the method for sending an electronic greeting card from a sender to a recipient. The schematic diagram shows three parts: Creating an electronic greeting card (202), sending an e-mail notice to the recipient (204), and allowing the recipient to view the electronic greeting card (for example, by way of a web page). Several steps in Figure 2 are executed by software in sender system (102) such as browser software (114) (used for creating an electronic greeting card by the sender). Several other steps in Figure 2 are executed by server system (104) (sending web page (126) /7 to sender system (102), creating an electronic greeting card web page, sending an e-mail to the recipient, and sending web page (128) to the recipient's browser). Several other steps in Figure 2 are executed by e-mail software in recipient system (160) (sending an e-mail message notifying the recipient of an electronic greeting card) and browser (172) of recipient system (160) (allowing the recipient to view the electronic greeting card). Figure 2 is a schematic diagram showing the process for sending an electronic greeting card, but does not show details, including the prize lottery described below.

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram of the method for selecting a prize lottery gift that can be won by the recipient of the electronic greeting card. In the working example shown in Figure 3, sender A is in the process of sending an electronic greeting card to recipient B. In addition to creating an electronic greeting card, the sender selects one gift from several gifts (24) that he or she thinks the recipient will like. Because the sender will want to view information on gifts that can be selected, the gift selection process offers examples of "acceptance ads" listing gifts that can be selected. Next, the electronic greeting card is sent to the recipient as described above. Furthermore, the recipient receives an explanation regarding the gift, and the sender/recipient pair receive an explanation of the method used to determine whether or not they win a gift. (As shown in Figure 3, the recipient can also decide to send an electronic greeting card to another third party, such as C, as a reply to the sender.)

As shown in Figure 3, a record specifying the sender/recipient pair and the gift selected is automatically inputted to server database (127) when the sender sends the electronic greeting card. Furthermore, as shown, when either the sender or the recipient sends question (252) asking whether or not they have won (through the web page described below), server (104) communicates to the sender or recipient whether or not this pair has won (254) by checking database (127).

Figure 4 is flowchart (300) showing the steps for creating and sending an electronic greeting card by a sender and selecting a gift that the sender and a recipient can win as a team. These steps are executed, for example, by browser software (114) connected to server system (104). These steps will be explained below for the web page examples shown in Figures 6 through 12 and Figure 15.

Step (302) in Figure 4 shows that the sender can select one of several "courses" corresponding to several advertising companies. Figure 6 is an example of a web page for selecting one of several courses (504) by the sender. This affects the gifts that the sender can select later. In the working example described, courses (504) are linked to appropriate gift categories or sources, but each of these is linked to an advertising company. Other working examples do not contain courses, but can mix descriptions of gifts from different sources. Using courses is considered as one example of a method for organizing descriptions of gifts.

In Figure 6, when the sender selects a specific course, the sender can also receive a gift selected by the advertising company paying for this course. For example, a golf club manufacturer can have several golf-related gifts, and a car manufacturer can have several car-related gifts. This becomes an opportunity for solicited ads (also called acceptance ads). This invention is a form of advertising (gift descriptions) that participants ask to see and show an interest in.

Figure 7 shows an example of a web page allowing the sender and the recipient to decide whether they want to create greeting cards (icon (550)) or view greeting cards already received (icon (552)). If the sender selects icon (550), the process for selecting a gift shown in Figure 8 is started. The greeting card that the sender is sending is entered in a gift prize lottery, and both the sender and the recipient either win or lose the lottery.

Step (304) in Figure 4 shows how a sender selects a gift (if the working example of this invention includes courses, a specific gift in a course). As described below, the gift is a gift that the sender and the recipient can win or lose as a team. Figure 8 shows an example of a web page on which the sender selects a gift that the sender and the recipient may win or lose. The sender proceeds by clicking wrapped gift icon (602). When icon (602) is clicked, the page shown in Figure 9 or Figure 10 is displayed.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 show examples of web pages for selecting one of several gifts that the sender and the recipient may win. In

both figures, the web page examples contain (appended) advertisement (702) (normally belonging to a course) for items that may be the same or different from the gifts. Both pages also contain pictures and descriptions of gifts corresponding to selected icon (706). The web page examples also contains several icons and similar areas (708). These icons (708) include icon (706) shown in the figure as the icon currently selected by the sender (marked *). In Figure 9, the sender has selected the first gift by icon (706). Description (704) for the corresponding gift is displayed on the web page. The sender can view another gift by selecting another icon among icons (708). If the sender thinks that he or she would like to select the icon currently displayed, the sender selects the gift by clicking "Enter" icon (710). In Figure 10, the sender has selected icon (707) for the third gift). Description (704) for the corresponding gift is displayed on the web paged. The sender can view another gift by selecting another icon among icons (708). As described below, this selection is entered in database (127) for the sender and the recipient. Advertisement (702) pertains to a different gift.

Step (306) in Figure 4 in the working example described, which is a process for creating an electronic greeting card by a sender for a recipient, requires filling out a questionnaire before the sender sends the first greeting card of a specific course. By requiring the sender to fill out a questionnaire (not shown), this system can set guidelines for advertisements for the sender. Step (304) (selecting a gift) and step (306) (creating a greeting card) can be executed in any appropriate order. Figures 11 and 12 are an example of a web page showing how a sender creates an electronic greeting card. Because of the length of the web page example for creating a greeting card, Figures 11 and 12 show this web page in two parts.

The web page in Figures 11 and 12 contains first section (802) listing the selected gift (if no gift is selected, this section is blank). The web page also contains second section (804) for the name and e-mail address entered by the sender. The sender can enter the name and e-mail address of the recipient in area (806) of the web page. As shown in the figure, the sender can select one or more recipients. In the working example described, each recipient entered receives the same gift. In other working examples, a very large number of recipients can be entered, for example, by registering recipients on a mailing list or many names and e-mail addresses. The names and e-mail addresses entered by the sender can be used for various purposes, such as direct market research of web users or gathering statistics. Alternately, the method for reducing this invention to practice can keep this information strictly private.

In the web page shown in Figure 12, the sender can select illustrations of electronic greeting cards in area (808). For example, the sender can select from three different illustrations. Needless to say, any desired number of illustration can be presented to the sender.

In the web page in Figure 12, the sender can also display electronic greeting card messages in area (810). For example, the sender may first select one of several messages in area (812), then enter a personal message in area (814). In other working examples, the sender can enter more or fewer messages.

In step (308) in Figure 5, the sender can send a completed greeting card to a recipient. For example, when the sender has finished designing the electronic greeting card, the sender clicks "OK" icon (852), and the electronic greeting card is sent to and stored by memory server (104). A gift can be selected by clicking "Redo from present selection" icon (850). By clicking this icon, the sender is sent to a page similar to Figure 8.

Finally, step (310) in Figure 5 automatically inputs the greeting card and enters both the sender and the recipient in a prize lottery for the selected gift. Preferably, this is entered by sending information on the sender and the recipient to server system (104) to be stored, for example, in database (127). Figure 15 shows an example of the format for entering in prize lottery database (127). This entry includes entrance ID (1002), sender's e-mail address (or other ID) (1004), recipient's e-mail address (or other ID) (1006), selected gift ID (1008), and other related data (1010). The format shown is no more than one example, and other appropriate databases can be used.

In the last section, it was explained how a sender sends an electronic greeting card to a recipient and selects a prize lottery gift that the sender and the recipient can win or lose as a team. Next, it will be explained how either the sender or the recipient views sent or received greeting cards, views gifts that can be won, and checks on the status of the prize lottery.

(3) How Participants Can Check Whether or Not They Have Won Gifts

Figure 5 is flowchart (400) of steps showing the process for checking whether or not the sender and the recipient have won the selected gift. These steps are executed, for example, by browser software (114) connected to server system (104) or the recipient's browser software (172). These steps will be explained for the web page

examples shown in Figures 13 and 14. When the sender (or recipient) selects "Look" icon (552) in Figure 7, the control proceeds to the process in Figures 13 and 14.

Figure 13 shows an example of a specified personal web page in which the sender or the recipient can check which electronic greeting cards the sender and the recipient have sent and what gift the sender and the recipient may win, but cannot check whether or not the sender and the recipient have won the gift. A page such as Figure 13 is displayed before the sender and recipient win a gift, and is not appropriate for displaying whether they have won or lost. A won/lost display is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 13 shows a specified personal web page having "received list" (952) and "sent list" (954). "Received list" (952) contains the names and e-mail addresses of persons who have sent greeting cards to participants. If desired, a participant can click the message "Send a /9 card to this person," and can create a greeting card by a method similar to the method described above and select a gift for the person sent the greeting card. In this way, more users are sent greeting cards.

A participant using the web page in Figure 13 can view a received greeting card by clicking any of Enter icons (960) in sent list (954). Furthermore, a participant can view the gift that can be won for each greeting card by clicking any of Enter icons (962) in received list (952). A participant using the web page in Figure 13 can view a sent greeting card by clicking any of Enter icons (964) in sent list (954). Furthermore, a participant can view gifts that can be won by clicking any of Enter icons (966) in sent list (954). By these search opportunities, participants create a page that is attractive to advertising companies who want the participants to see their advertisements. In addition, the participants will want to return to the page to see how many opportunities they have to win various gifts.

Figure 14 shows an example of a specified personal web page in which either of the sender or the recipient (called "participants") can check which electronic greeting cards have been sent, what gift they can win, and whether or not they have won the gift. A specified personal web page is created by server (104) by methods known to all persons skilled in the art. Once server (104) knows the e-mail address and password (or other specific ID) of a participant requesting the web page, the server can determine whether the participant has sent a greeting card to anyone or received a greeting card from anyone by searching database (127). Next, server (104) creates a specified

personal web page such as shown in Figures 13 and 14 for display on the browsers of the participants.

Each input column in "Received list" (902) in Figure 14 displays "Win" or "Lose," and shows whether the participant pair and other persons sending or receiving greeting cards have won or lost the gift. Needless to say, the won/lost display is not displayed until the prize lottery has taken place and someone receives a gift. In the working examples described, all gifts are given some days after New Year's Day, but in other working examples, gifts are given every day, at the beginning of every month, or linked to other appropriate events. Gifts may be determined by a person drawing names from the beginning or some other appropriate method, but are randomly selected electronically.

Figure 17 shows an example showing a web page after a sender has created a greeting card. For example, when the user clicks icon (964) in Figures 13 and 14, the page in Figure 17 is displayed, and the user can view the greeting card that he or she sent. When the recipient clicks icon (962), the recipient can also view the page in the same way (except that it may have the title "This is the greeting card that you received").

(4) Time Sensitivity in Certain Working Examples

Figure 16 is a schematic diagram of a working example of this invention showing how the date and time that a recipient views an electronic greeting card may affect the display of the electronic greeting card. Other working examples of this invention do not have this time-sensitive aspect, but all display the electronic greeting card using the same format. This should be kept in mind. As shown in Figure 16, the entire process is divided into three periods. Because the working examples described above are for receiving New Year's cards, the period in question is before and after New Year's Day. In other working examples, this period is another holiday or date, a season (such as spring), some other period (such as a weekend vacation or a month-long vacation), or an extremely short period of one day or less.

In the working example described, an electronic greeting card is created by a sender between November 28 and January 16. The recipient can view the New Year's card between January 1 and March 2. The recipient can view different greeting cards by viewing at different times. The sender can send greeting cards after New Year's Day, but because these greeting cards do not have certain viewing options, the greeting cards cannot be viewed on New Year's Day.

As shown in the figure, the recipient can view the text and illustrations of the greeting card before December 31. When the recipient tries to view the greeting card, the recipient receives a message that the card cannot be viewed. However, the recipient can view a specified personal web page such as Figures 13 and 14 showing that a greeting card has been sent to the recipient and who sent the greeting card any time before December 31. Participants can also view greeting cards they themselves have sent or received and what gifts they may win at any time. However, if users click the "display card" icon before December 31 for a greeting card that they have received, they receive a message that they cannot view the electronic greeting card before New Year's Day. Participants can always view the contents of cards they have sent to other people.

Specified personal web pages always have advertising. In the working example described, approximately 70% of keyword advertisements are activated in specified personal web pages (and other system web pages) by data entered in questionnaires filled out by the senders. Therefore, the banner advertisement in the header of the sender (and recipient) web page is driven by what the sender has input.

When a greeting card is first sent, the system automatically sends an e-mail notifying the recipient that there is a greeting card and the recipient can view this on a specified personal web page. In /10 the working example described, the recipient can view the web page by entering his or her e-mail address and the password given by the e-mail notice. This system also sends a confirmation e-mail notifying the sender that the greeting card has been sent and is safely stored by the server system or the sender can view the greeting card. The example in the working example sends an e-mail notifying the recipient that the received greeting card can be viewed from January 1 to March 2. By viewing an electronic greeting card during a predetermined period, a special New Year's card (or special advertisement) and perhaps animation or other special aspects can be displayed in addition to the greeting card selected. An example of this type of special page is shown in Figure 18. This special screen can be displayed only just before or after New Year's Day or for an extremely short period (such as two weeks) on either side of New Year's Day. In the working example described, the special screen is displayed when the greeting card is viewed from New Year's Day to January 16. As described above, this excites an urge in recipients to use the icons on their own specified personal web page to send their own greeting card to the people who sent them a greeting card.

Furthermore, as shown in the figure, in the working example described, the selected gift is given out on February 2. The recipient (and the sender) can view a specified personal web page to learn whether or not they have won the gift on this day or thereafter. Thus, the specified personal web page continues to be viewed after both the sender and recipient have viewed the greeting card, increasing the number of times that the participants see the advertisements on the specified personal web page. The sender and the recipient win the gift as a team. That is, if the entered greeting card wins the prize lottery and either the sender or the recipient is a winner, both the sender and the recipient can win the gift. In the working example described, the winners are notified by a central location by facsimile whether or not they have won the gift.

At least one working example of this invention deals with the problem when someone tries to create a greeting card without knowing the other person's e-mail address or similarly for an address that does not exist (in an attempt to enter the prize lottery). In this working example, such improper conduct is prevented by sending and tracking a confirmation mail to the sender. If the confirmation mail is returned for any reason (such as if the mail server determines that the address is incorrect), the system determines that there is a possibility that this address is incorrect. Once the system determines that a certain address is incorrect, the user cannot create a new greeting card using this address.

At least one working example of this invention solves the problem when one sender creates and sends a million greeting cards. This conduct causes the system to malfunction or operate extremely slowly. This conduct occurs, for example, when a sender uses an automatic input software program. To avoid this possibility, at least one working example of this invention sets certain conditions on the sender regarding the number of greeting cards that can be sent. For example:

- 1) The sender can create and send only one greeting card for a specific recipient (a specific e-mail address) in each course; or
- 2) The sender can create and send (for example) no more than ten greeting cards in each course.

The number of greeting cards can be limited ahead of time, and can differ for different users or according to different classes of users.

[Effects of the Invention]

Stated briefly, this invention offers a method and device for sending an electronic greeting card to one or more recipients and automatically entering both the sender and the recipient in a prize lottery for a gift selected by the sender. If either the sender or the recipient wins, both win the gift. Both the sender and the recipient can later check on-line whether or not they have won the selected gift. At least one of the working examples of this invention pertains to sending an electronic New Year's card (or other special holiday greeting card). This working example records the day that the electronic greeting card can be viewed. If the electronic greeting card arrives early and an attempt is made to view it before New Year's Day, it may say that a greeting card has been received, but the recipient cannot actually view it. The electronic greeting card itself cannot be viewed until New Year's Day.

Working examples of this invention were explained above, but it should be clear that many substitutes, corrections, and modifications can be devised by persons skilled in the art based on the explanation given above. Therefore, this invention includes all of the above substitutes, corrections, and modifications falling within the spirit and scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

[Brief Explanation of the Figures]

[Figure 1] Block diagram of a data processing system according to the first working example of this invention.

[Figure 2] Diagram illustrating the method for sending an electronic greeting card from a sender to a recipient.

[Figure 3] Diagram illustrating the method for selecting a prize lottery gift that a sender and a recipient of an electronic greeting card can win.

[Figure 4] Flowchart showing steps allowing a sender to create and send an electronic greeting card, and win a gift selected by the sender and a recipient as a team.

[Figure 5] Flowchart showing a process allowing a sender or a recipient to check whether or not they have won a selected gift.

[Figure 6] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page for selecting one of several courses affecting the gift that a sender can /11

later select.

[Figure 7] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page allowing a sender and a recipient to determine whether or not to view a greeting card after already receiving or sending many greeting cards.

[Figure 8] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page allowing a sender to select a gift to be won by the sender and a recipient.

[Figure 9] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page allowing a sender to select one gift from several gifts to be won by the sender and a recipient.

[Figure 10] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page allowing a sender to select one gift from several gifts to be won by the sender and a recipient.

[Figure 11] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page showing how a sender creates an electronic greeting card.

[Figure 12] Diagram illustrating a working example of a web page showing how a sender creates an electronic greeting card.

[Figure 13] Diagram illustrating a working example of a specified personal web page allowing a sender and a recipient to check whether any electronic greeting card has been sent, but not allowing them to check whether or not they have won a gift.

[Figure 14] Diagram illustrating a working example of specified personal web page allowing a sender and a recipient to check whether any electronic greeting card has been sent, and allowing them to check whether or not they have won a gift.

[Figure 15] Diagram illustrating a working example of a format for input to prize lottery database (127).

[Figure 16] Diagram illustrating a working example when the greeting card of this invention is time-sensitive.

[Figure 17] Diagram illustrating a working example of a greeting card.

[Figure 18] Diagram illustrating a working example of a special display screen displayed when a greeting card is viewable during a

predetermined period.

[Key to Reference Numbers]

102 sender system
110 processor
112 memory
114 browser software
115 e-mail software
118 downloaded web page
119 e-mail message
150 input device
152 display device
154 input device for reading a computer-readable medium
156 computer-readable medium
104 server
122 processor
124 memory
125 server software
126 web page for creating greeting card
127 database (including prize lottery)
128 greeting card web page (including prize lottery)
129 e-mail software
160 recipient system
162 processor
164 memory
166 e-mail software
168 downloaded greeting card web page
170 data
172 browser
1002 prize lottery number
1004 e-mail address of sender
1006 e-mail address of recipient
1008 selected gift

Figure 1

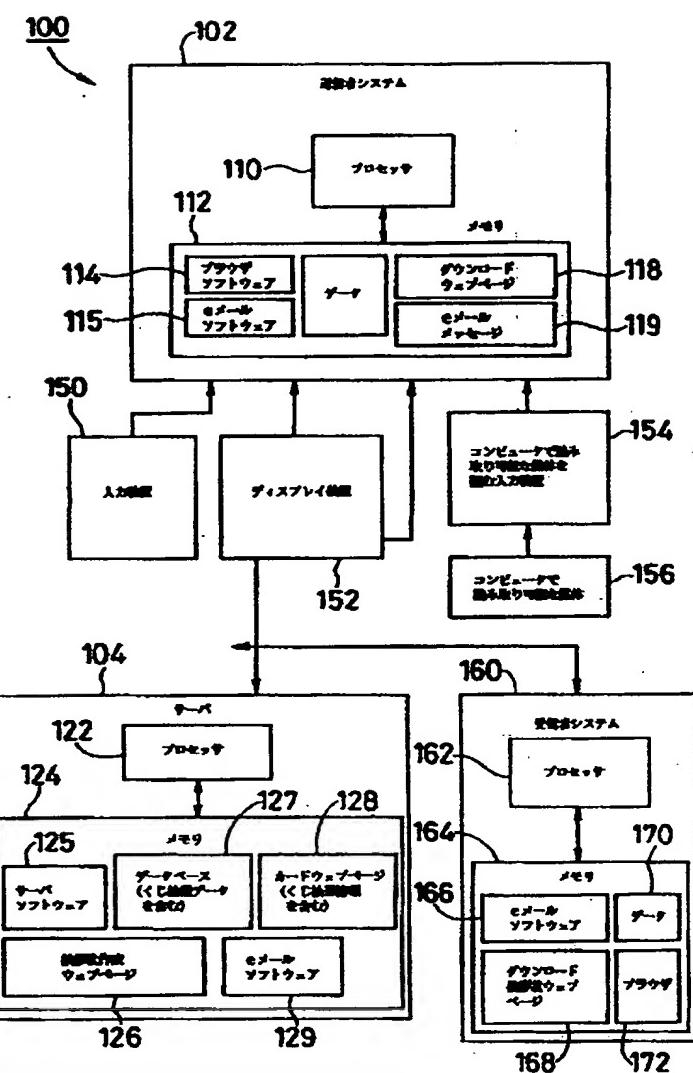


Figure 1

Key: 102 ... sender system, 114 ... browser software, 115 ... e-mail software, 118 ... downloaded web page, 119 ... e-mail message, 150 ... input device, 152 ... display device, 154 ... input device for reading a computer-readable medium, 156 ... computer-readable medium, 104 ... server, 122 ... processor, 124 ... memory, 125 ... server software, 126 ... web page for creating greeting card, 127 ... database (including prize lottery), 128 ... greeting card web page (including prize lottery), 129 ... e-mail software, 160 ... recipient system, 162 ... processor, 164 ... memory, 166 ... e-mail software, 168 ... downloaded greeting card web page, 170 ... data, 172 ... browser

Figure 2

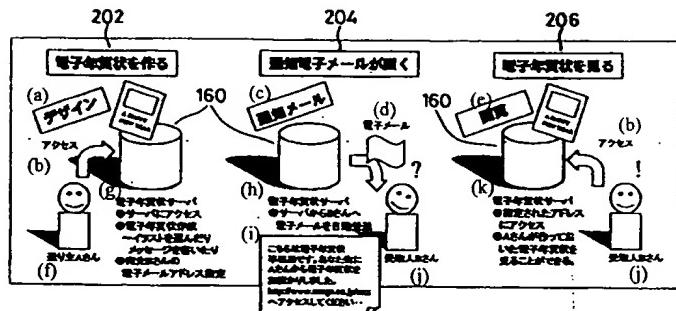


Figure 2

Key: 202 ... Creating an Electronic New Year's Card, 204 ... Sending an E-Mail Notice, 206 ... Viewing an Electronic New Year's Card, (a) ... Design, (b) ... access, (c) ... Notice Mail, (d) ... e-mail, (e) ... View, (f) ... Sender A
 (g) ... New Year's Card Server

- Access server
- Create electronic New Year's card ... select illustration, write message, etc.
- Indicate e-mail address of Recipient B

(h) ... New Year's Card Server

- Access server
- Automatically send e-mail from server to B:

(i) ... This is the Electronic New Year's Card Office. We are holding an electronic New Year's card from A addressed to you. Please access <http://www.nenga.co.jp/xxx>

(j) ... Recipient B

(k) ... New Year's Card Server

- Access indicated address
- Allow viewing of electronic New Year's card created by A

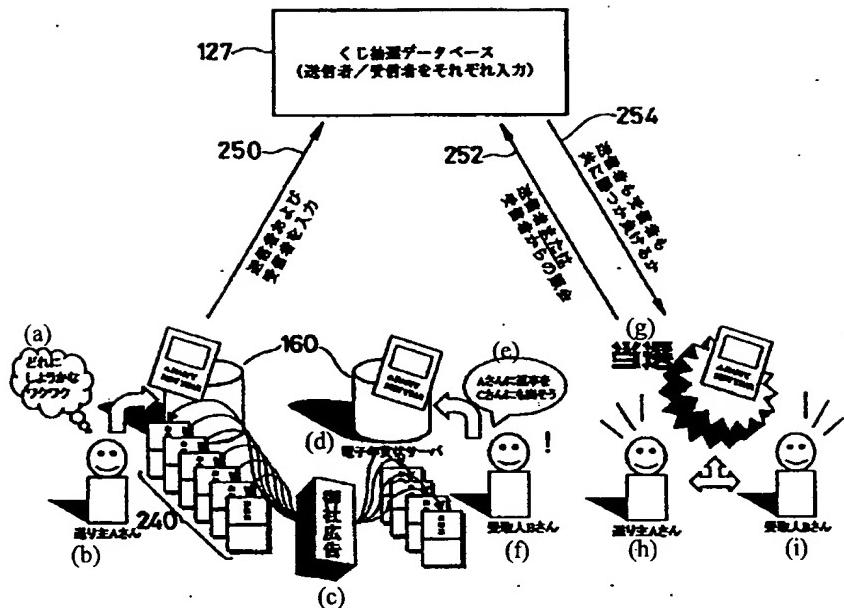


Figure 3

Key: 127 ... prize lottery database (entered for both sender and recipient), 250 ... input by sender and recipient, 252 ... verification by sender or recipient, 254 ... sender and recipient win or lose together, (a) ... "I wonder which one to choose???", (b) ... Sender A, (c) ... your company's advertisement, (d) ... electronic New Year's card server, (e) ... "Shall I reply to A, and also send one to C?", (f) ... Recipient B, (g) ... Winner, (h) ... Sender A, (i) ... Recipient B.

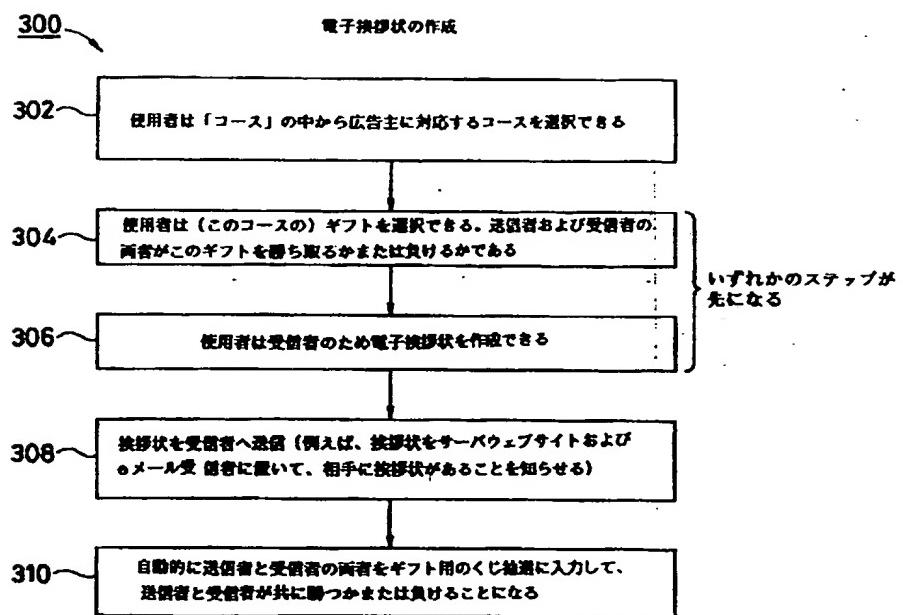


Figure 4

Key: 300 ... Creating an Electronic Greeting Card

302 ... The user can select a course corresponding to an advertiser from several "courses"

304 ... The user can select a gift (from this course); both the sender and the recipient will win or lose this gift

306 ... The user can create an electronic greeting card for the recipient

304/306} ... Either step can go first

308 ... The greeting card is sent to the recipient (for example, the greeting card is sent to the server site and held for the e-mail recipient, and the latter is notified that there is a greeting card)

310 ... Both the sender and the recipient are automatically entered in a prize lottery for the gift, which the sender and the recipient win or lose together

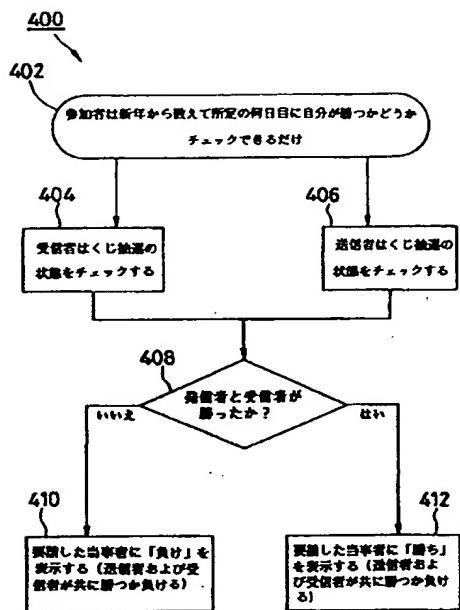


Figure 5

Key: 400 ... Checking Whether Participants Have Won

402 ... Participants can only check whether or not they themselves have won during a set number of days counting from New Year's Day

404 ... The recipient checks the status of the prize lottery

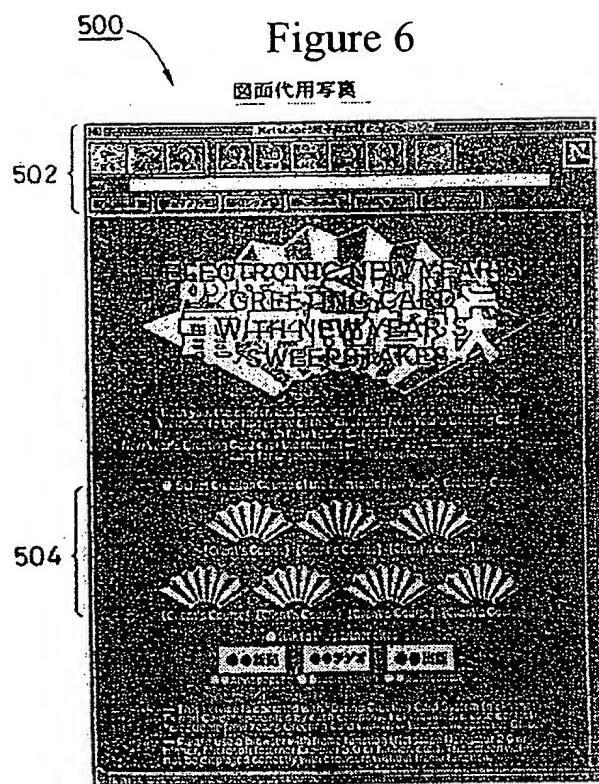
406 ... The sender checks the status of the prize lottery

408 ... Did the sender and the recipient win?

no: 410 ... Display "lose" to requesting party (the sender and the recipient win or lose together)

yes: 412 ... Display "win" to requesting party (the sender and the recipient win or lose together)

Figure 6



Welcome to the New Year's Card With New Year's Prize Lottery!
Use the Internet to send a greeting card for New Year's Day!
It's very easy to create a greeting card.
Anyone can send an electronic greeting card at no charge
(requests must be received by January 15).
Furthermore, a prize lottery will be held, and both you the
sender and one other person, the recipient, can receive a
wonderful New Year's gift (lottery results can be known
starting January 31).
Start from this point with "Create" and "Actual View"!

NEW YEAR'S CARD ...

Create!

View!

This service is provided by "New Year's Card System" (nickname:
Topsy-Turvy Cards) sponsored by several companies. Direct
inquiries to "New Year's Prize Lottery Office New Year's Card."
Use a browser having a frame function (Netscape Navigator 2.0
or higher, or Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0 or higher).
(Screens cannot be displayed correctly by browsers lacking a
frame function.)

Figure 7

browser header

1 Select a New Year's gift!

We have prepared several New Year's gifts that you will want to win. Click the New Year's gift envelopes to look inside. Once you have decided which of the seven you like best, click the <Select> button followed by the <Choose> button.

Figure 8

Key: 600 ... New Year's Card With New Year's Gift Lottery

How to Use / Before Using / Q & A

602 ... New Year's Gift

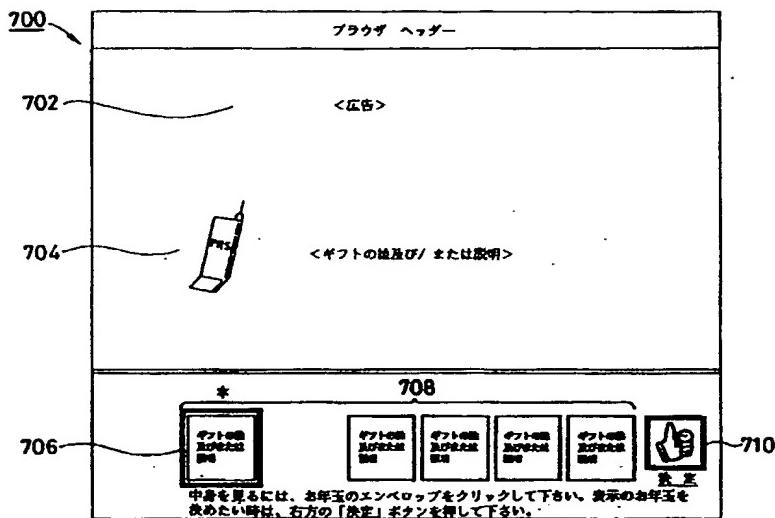


Figure 9

Key: 700 ... browser header

702 ... <advertisement>

704 ... <picture and/or description of gift>

706 ... picture and/or description of gift

708 ... picture and/or description of gift [x 4]

710 ... Choose

(a) ... Click the New Year's gift envelopes to look inside. When you want to choose one of the New Year's gifts shown, click the <Choose> button on the right.

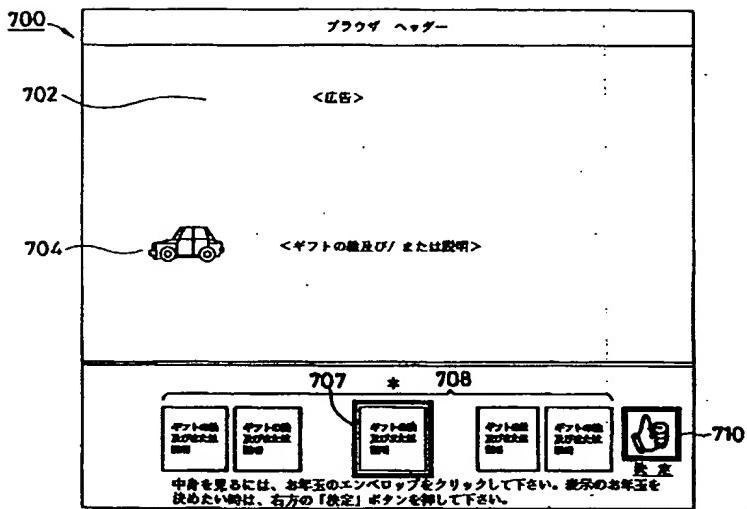


Figure 10

Key: 700 ... browser header

702 ... <advertisement>

704 ... <picture and/or description of gift>

707 ... picture and/or description of gift

708 ... picture and/or description of gift [x 4]

710 ... Choose

(a) ... Click the New Year's gift envelopes to look inside. When you want to choose one of the New Year's gifts shown, click the <Choose> button on the right.

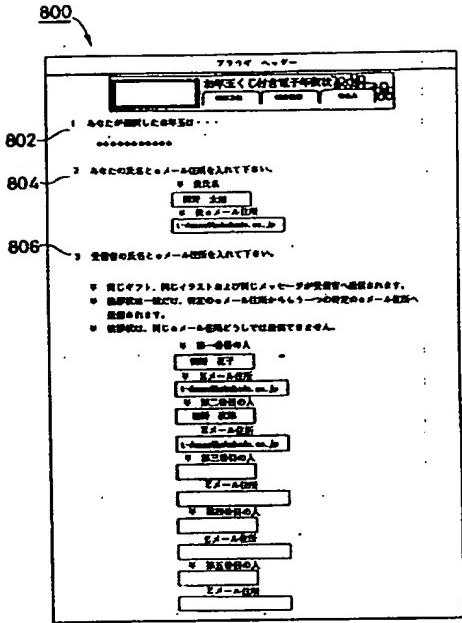


Figure 11

Key: 800 ... browser header

(a) ... New Year's Card With New Year's Gift Lottery
How to Use / Before Using / Q & A

802 ... 1 The New Year's gift you have selected is

804 ... 2 Enter your name and e-mail address:
* Your First and Last Name
[Taro Tanaka]
* Your E-Mail Address
[t-denno@hakuhodo.co.jp]

806 ... 3 Enter the name and e-mail address of recipients:
* Each recipient will be sent the same gift, the same illustration, and the same message.
* Only one greeting card will be sent from one specified e-mail address to another specified e-mail address.
* You cannot send a greeting card from and to the same e-mail address.
* First Person
[Hanako Tanaka]
* E-Mail Address
[t-denno@hakuhodo.co.jp]
* Second Person
[Jiro Tanaka]

* E-Mail Address
[t-denno@hakuhodo.co.jp]
* Third Person
[]
* E-Mail Address
[]
* Fourth Person
[]
* E-Mail Address
[]
* Fifth Person
[]
* E-Mail Address
[]

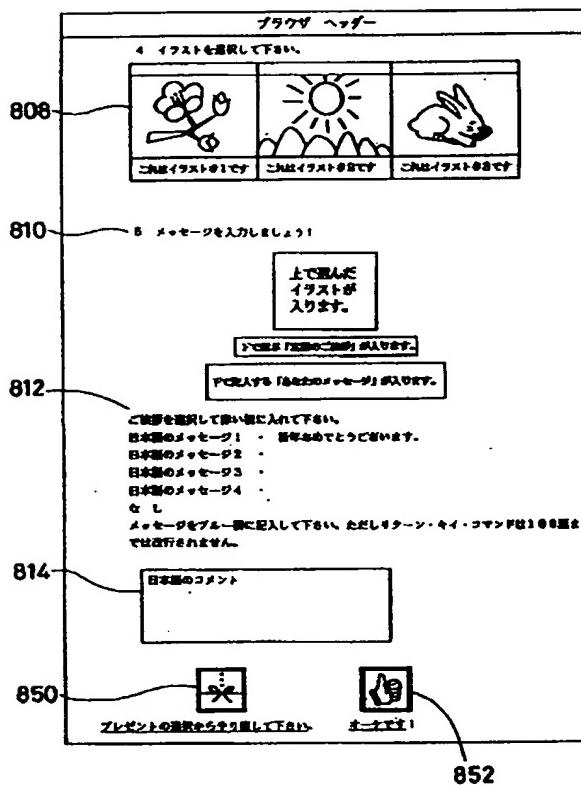


Figure 12

Key: [top] ... browser header

808 ... 4 Select an illustration:

This is illustration #1

This is illustration #2

This is illustration #3

810 ... 5 Enter a message

Insert the
illustration
selected above.

Insert the "specific
greeting" entered below.

Insert "your message" entered below.

812 ... Select a greeting and insert in the red box:
message in Japanese 1: Happy New Year's

message in Japanese 2:
message in Japanese 3:
message in Japanese 4:
none

Enter your message in the blue box. However, the return key command will not start a new line up to 100 [illegible].

814 ... message in Japanese
850 ... Change, starting from present number.
852 ... OK!

Figure 13

図面代用写真

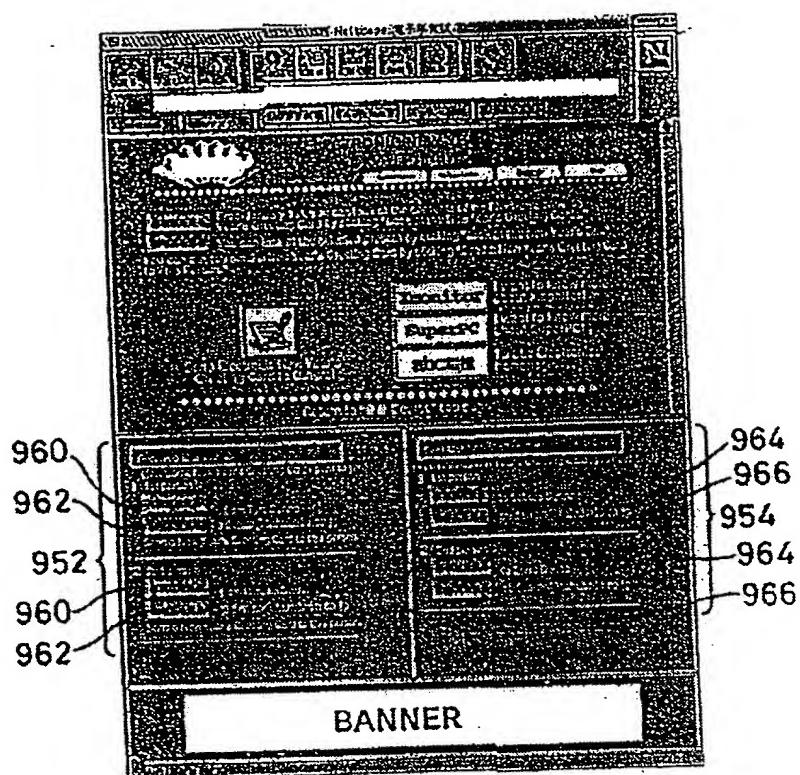
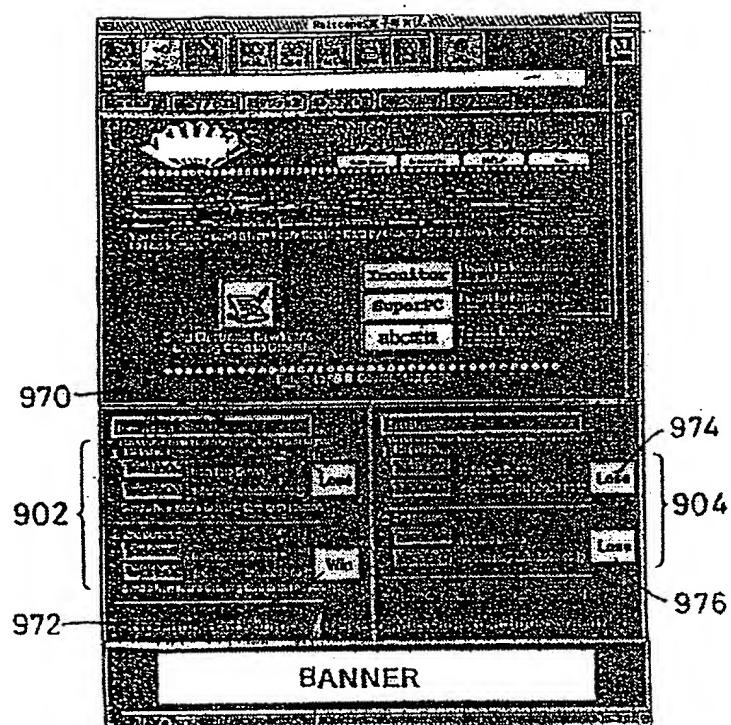


Figure 14

図面代用写真



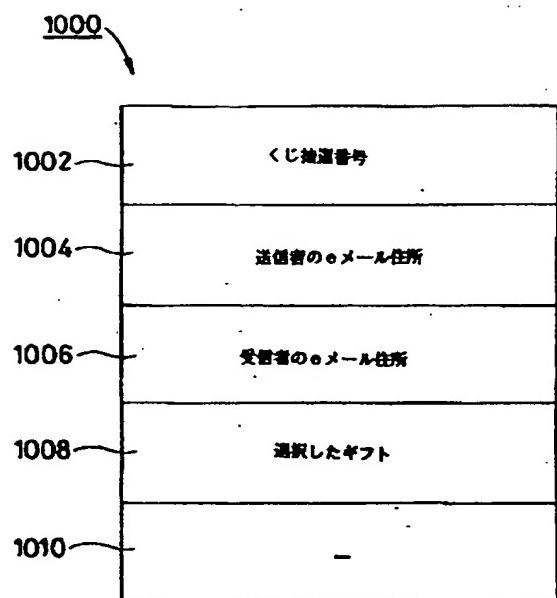


Figure 15

Key: 1000 ... Example of Format for Input to Prize Lottery Database
 1002 ... prize lottery number
 1004 ... e-mail address of sender
 1006 ... e-mail address of recipient
 1008 ... selected gift

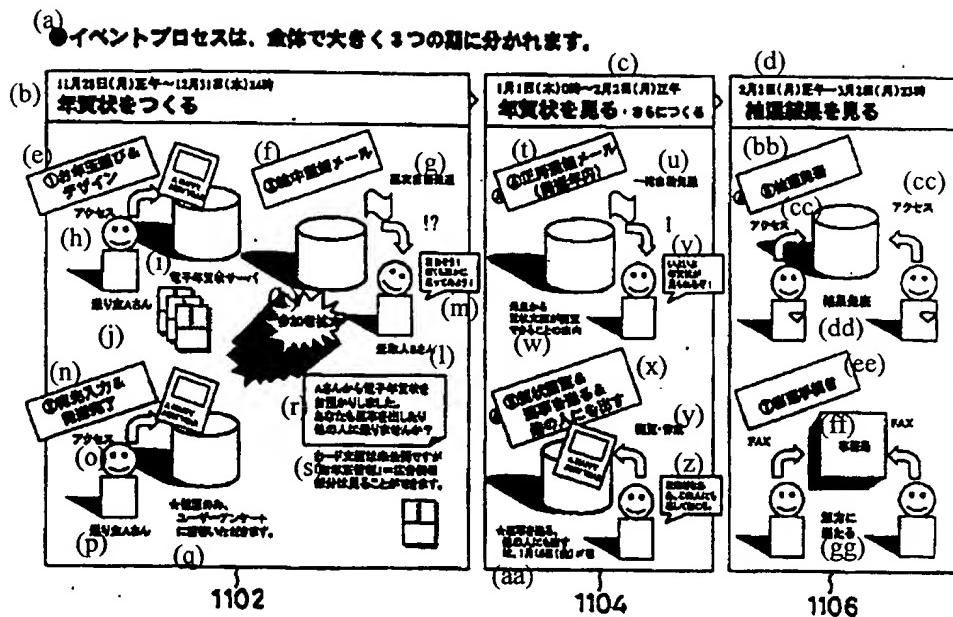


Figure 16

- Key: (a) ... ●Event processes are divided broadly into three periods:
 (b) ... November 28 (Mon) 12:00 to December 31 (Wed) 14:00
 Create greeting card
 (c) ... January 1 (Thu) 00:00 to February 2 (Mon) 12:00
 View greeting card (then create more)
 (d) ... February 2 (Mon) 12:00 to March 2 (Mon) 23:00
 View lottery results

1102: (e) ... ① select and design New Year's card, (f) ... ③ mail notice while holding, (g) ... automatically send notice, (h) ... access, (i) ... Sender A, (j) ... electronic New Year's card server, (k) ... expands number of participants, (l) ... Recipient B, (m) ... [illegible] prize [illegible], (n) ... ② input address and complete [illegible], (o) ... access, (p) ... Sender A, (q) ... ★ first time only: ask sender to answer user questionnaire, (r) ... We are holding an electronic greeting card from A. Wouldn't you like to reply or send a greeting card to someone else?, (s) ... Card text and graphics are not disclosed, but "New Year's gift information" = advertisement part can be viewed.

1104: (t) ... ④ New Year's [illegible] mail (during [illegible] year), (u) ... automatically send one, (v) ... "I can see more and more greeting card!", (w) ... guide to how to view greeting card text and graphics from desktop, (x) ... ⑤ [illegible] card,

send reply, and send cards to other people, (y) ... [illegible] and create, (z) ... "This is so [illegible], I'm going to send one to this person too.", (aa) ... ★ sending reply and sending cards to others until January 16 (Fri)

1106: (bb) ... ⑥ [illegible], (cc) ... access, (dd) ... send results, (ee) ... ⑦ [illegible], (ff) ... office, (gg) ... sent to both.

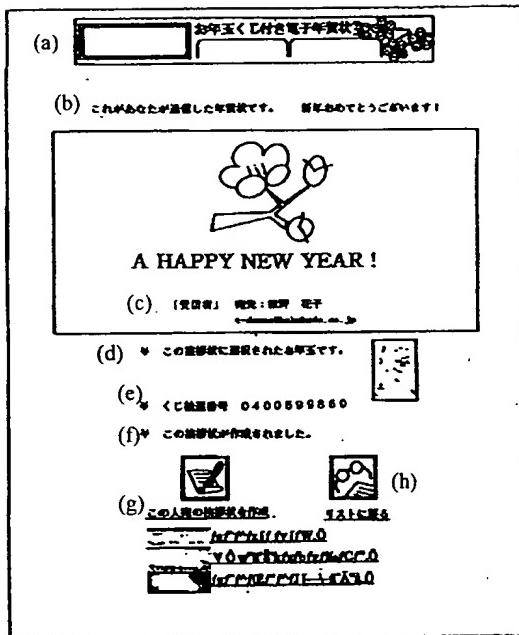
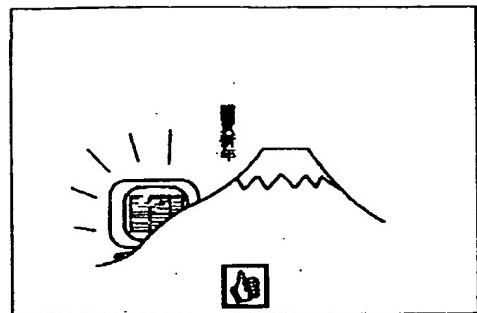


Figure 17

- Key:
- (a) ... Electronic New Year's Card With New Year's Gift
 - (b) ... This is the New Year's card you sent. Happy New Year's!
 - (c) ... [Recipient] TO: Hanako Tanaka, t-denno@hakuhodo.co.jp
 - (d) ... * This is the gift selected for this greeting card.
 - (e) ... Prize lottery number: 0400599860
 - (f) ... This greeting card has been created.
 - (g) ... Create a greeting card addressed to this person
 - (h) ... Return to list

Figure 18
Key: Happy New Year's



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